

Economic Development Commission Westerly Economic Plans - Summary

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The goals of this presentation to Westerly's Planning Board are to...

- Introduce the Planning Board to work the EDC has been doing per the 2020 Comprehensive Plan towards the development of:
 - An overall economic strategy for downtown, and
 - An economic strategy for commercial corridors (Route 1)
- Gain feedback, suggestions, additions, comments AND support and participation
 - Specific feedback is sought re: the “guiding principles” in the plans that shape and delimit the recommendations
 - Specific participation is needed in areas of land use ordinances so that the plans can be realized
 - Work with the EDC on a roadmap for moving forward



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- Background
- Economic Plan Summary
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Based on the new, 2020 Comprehensive Plan, the EDC focused on supporting five Comp Plan action items

EDC Goals and Objectives

- “...orderly growth
- “...increase[d] quality and quantity of job opportunities
- “...local business
- “...Town’s Comprehensive Plan

This Project’s Scope

1. Develop an **overall economic strategy for downtown** that clearly articulates this plan’s vision and attracts investors, commercial businesses, and residents.
2. Support the development and implementation of an **economic strategy for commercial corridors** that clearly articulate the town’s vision and attracts investors and commercial businesses to these areas



This summary reflects EDC findings, conclusions and recommendations to date

EDC Plan Development

- ✓ Stakeholder interviews; initial findings and conclusions
- ✓ Refinement and finalization of EDC's vision
- ☐ Socialize and update with Planning Board

Socialize and Refine the Plan

Next steps include input and refinement from others and operationalizing the plans

- Development of more specific visions/plans
- Public presentation/comment
- Deeper examination of how to make it work/operationally

Implement Plan Elements

- Realization of economic plan elements in development proposals, ordinance and regulatory changes
- Building of plan-sympathetic developments
- Supporting town processes and organization elements



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Economic Plan – Findings Summary

- Great town, great potential
- Existing investments tend to be:
 - Uncoordinated with surroundings
 - Less attractive than could be
- On Route 1, existing spaces are under used and under productive for owners and the town
 - Parking Lot Deserts,
 - Single Story Strips,
 - Individual Curb Cuts
 - Multiple lots stripped but idle
 - Multiple vacancies in existing strip malls
- Downtown has made great strides, anchors are in place, continuing to build and grow is the goal
- Developers and investors say that working with the town can be a challenge
- In contrast, citizens and conservators believe the town favors development over preservation of existing assets



The year-round economy can compliment tourism and be vibrant in and of itself for the benefit of all Westerly

- Westerly is located at the Atlantic Ocean where it meets Long Island Sound. Transitions are where variety and interests abound



- Tourists and summer residents are a key target market for Westerly's year-round appeal
- Beach communities and tourism, form the basis of a tourism economy that serves all of Westerly well as the foundation of Westerly's economy



Downtown has made great strides – the next strides can have enormous benefit

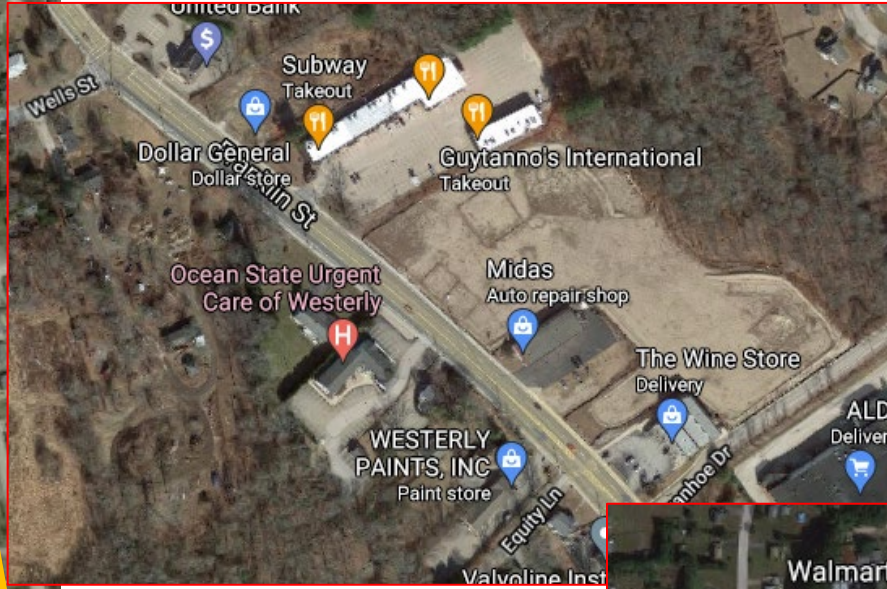
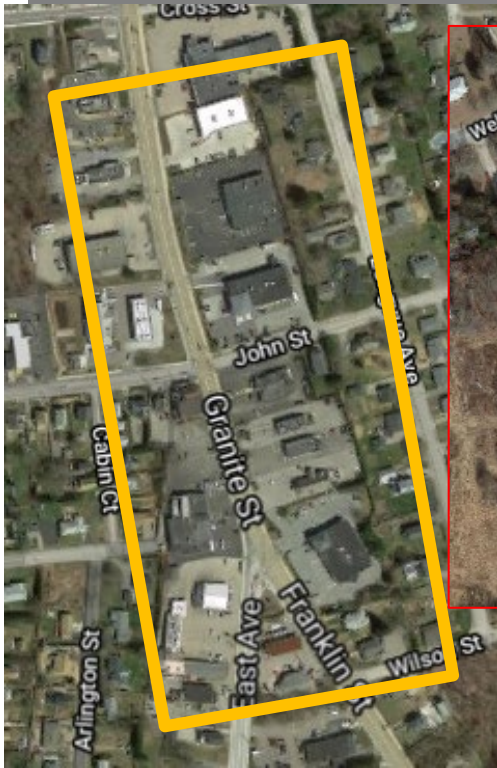


Key businesses and institutions serve as economic anchors from McQuades grocery, through arts and hospitality, to Grey Sail

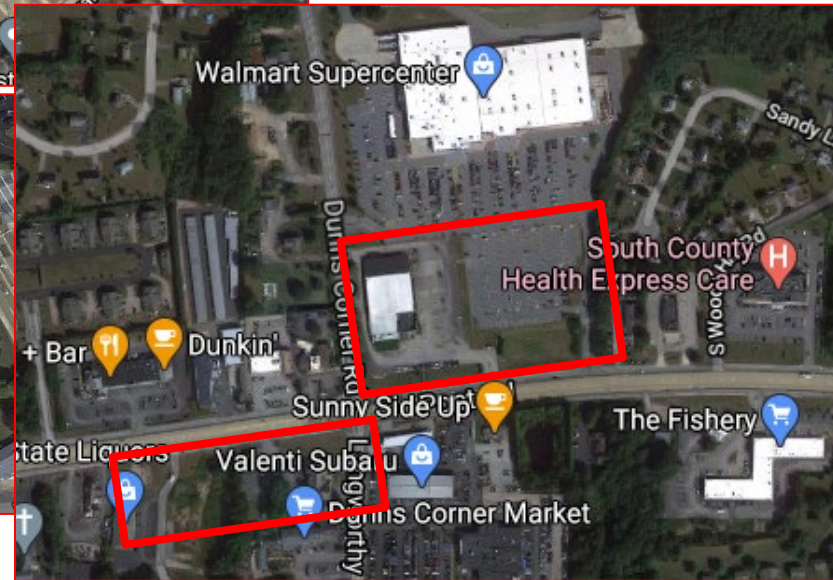
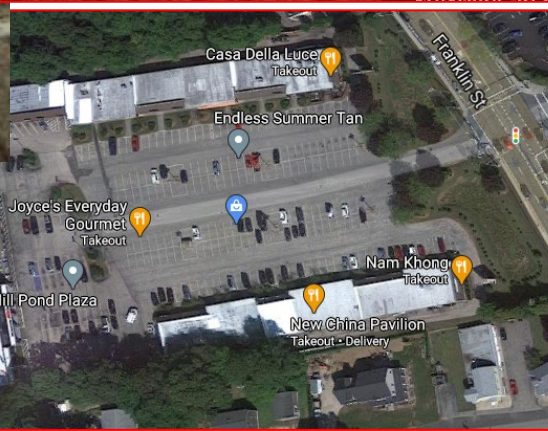
North on Canal and South on Main Street, empty, currently unattractive sites are too common but are also tomorrow's opportunities



Along the Route 1 Corridor there are empty lots, incomplete renovations, curb cuts, tired mini-malls and over sized parking lots



From Upper Franklin Street thru to Walmart, i.e. the Route 1 Corridor has multiple greyfields and tired strip malls which offer significant opportunities for revitalization and alignment with 21st Century life



Individual but related visions for Westerly's Downtown and for the Route 1 Corridor

Westerly's Downtown should continue its path towards Main Street USA with a strong arts, entertainment, and hospitality base



- A daily destination for residents
- A year-round multi-day destination for Eastern Connecticut, South-central Massachusetts and Rhode Island

The Route 1 Corridor should migrate to a series of South County Commons-styled locations

- Commercial/Retail on the ground floor
- Residential, including low and moderate income, on the second floor



- Reduction in parking lot deserts
- Walkable, visually appealing, streetscapes off Route 1

Westerly's Downtown is revitalizing – many opportunities remain

- Westerly has a traditional, New England, downtown



- Much recent reinvestment
 - United Theater/Arts Centers
 - Renovations of High Street for residences
 - Active foot-traffic thru the pandemic
- Material grants becoming available to help define, design and implement projects

- Main Street – South of Dixon Square
 - Notable recent investments
 - Cinders
 - 134 Main Street (Across from Dick's), stalled for now
 - Owners of existing buildings have shown interest in investments but stalled (Dick's plaza)
 - Some under-used lots offer opportunities, e.g. Parking lot across from Bridge
 - How to get to “yes”?
- Upper Canal Street – North of the Railroad
 - Street scaping that mirrors downtown and simple beautification will increase foot traffic and opportunities
 - The parking lot at former National Grid will enhance all business prospects



Guiding principals for evaluating next steps

- Protect, do NOT cannibalize, existing residential areas
- Leverage and re-use already commercialized properties
 - Greyfields
 - Empty lots and buildings
 - Aging mini-malls
 - Parking lot deserts
- Mixed uses in these leverageable areas
 - ... just as with High Street downtown*
 - Retail/commercial on the ground floor
 - Residential above
- Mini-destinations with “community feel” over “automotive centric commerce”
- Infrastructures and services appropriate to the plan



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Ordinance, Infrastructure and services appropriate to the plan – needs Planning Board support

Some Ordinance changes will be required for some portions of the plan

- Permission of mixed-use, “South County Commons” styled development in grey fields, empty lots, tired malls in the Corridor and Downtown
- Alignment to promote development of a “Main Street USA” vision of walkable commercial and recreational environment

Westerly should encourage, and in some cases participate in, infrastructure service extensions for the immediate viability and long term success of many plan elements:

- North Canal Street and Main Street street-scaping to mirror core downtown
- High Speed internet for Work From Home
- Water and sewage extensions where needed in Route 1 Corridor
- Riverfront revitalization and clean up in support of and anticipation of a Riverway



A challenge: either Westerly “Town Hall” is hard to work with or its beholden to relatively uncontrolled development – hard to be both...

Developers and investors say...

Staff in Town Hall are hard to deal with, communicate poorly, unhelpful to new ideas and more...



Citizens and Advocates say...

Staff in Town Hall are beholden to development, pay lip-service to citizens, don't protect neighborhoods, and more...

In order to ensure that these strategies and underlying programs to be successful Westerly could attempt to reduce the breadth and weight of the barbell:

- Citizen involvement in exercising and finalizing the individual programs
 - The Planning Board is starting work on Neighborhood participation
- A communication plan and process: what are the programs, what progress has been made and is to come, what are the issues/opportunities?
- Opportunity to adjust (via changes in rules) when best for Westerly, its neighborhoods and its economy



EDC and Planning to collaborate and determine next steps

Defining EDC & Planning Board working relationship to develop the economic strategies for Downtown and Route 1 corridor

1. Create the high-level program steps
2. Establish owners for the program steps
3. Identify and engage stakeholders; create communication strategy
4. Discuss and prioritize relevant potential follow-up initiatives within and across programs
5. Determine and prioritize specific next steps
6. Monitor progress



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EDC Initiatives that apply to Downtown and the Route 1 Corridor

- Mixed Uses in specific locations with set, preferred design criteria*
- University Partnership on Design Competitions/Proposals*
- Funding infrastructure and facilities (Opportunity Zones, Grants, others)
- Development, building, zoning process design to “systematize” Westerly’s view of development
 - Targeted anchors for specific parts of town
 - Processes and decisions that support and create “intentional infill”
 - Planning/Building/Zoning Tech Team Revitalization
- Westerly and Working From Home (status, ranking, marketing, metrics)
- A Marketing Plan (already on EDC agenda) defining and selling Westerly as “a place to go”, “an intact miracle”
- Development Services Liaison
- RIPTA shuttles from Downtown/Route 1 Parking to beaches, and back



Additional EDC Initiatives

Downtown and Route 1

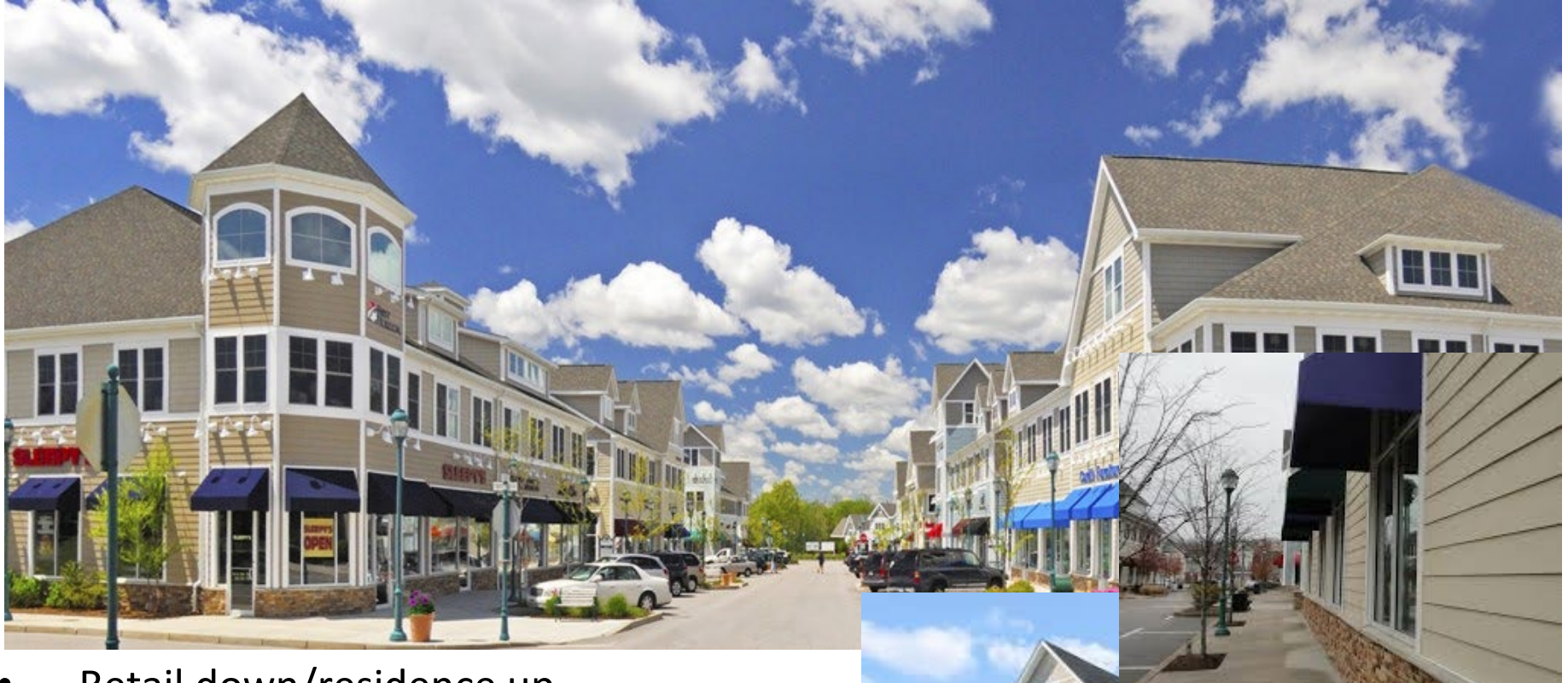
- Hotels and Hospitality
 - Business Class Hotel for Route 1*
 - Boutique Hotel for Downtown*
- Street-scaping
 - North Canal and Main Street
 - Granite to Rt. 78
- Transit Oriented Development
 - Lyft or similar recruitment
 - Lyft/Uber Kiosks
 - Valet parking service for all of “Downtown Corridor” especially for peak periods
 - Rail line

Downtown

- Re-engagement of the Downtown Business Association and the EDC
- Info and signage focused on visitors
- Tourism Maps (e.g.: Lighthouse Maps, show beach communities on one side, Downtown on the other)
- Downtown/Beach Community transit
- Beyond Funday Sunday – add picnics, food trucks, public art
- Riverfront Revitalization – Strategy and Regulatory Engagement



South County Commons – a visual example/concept



- Retail down/residence up
- Neighborhood feel, walkable,
- Design says “a village” not “a strip mall”



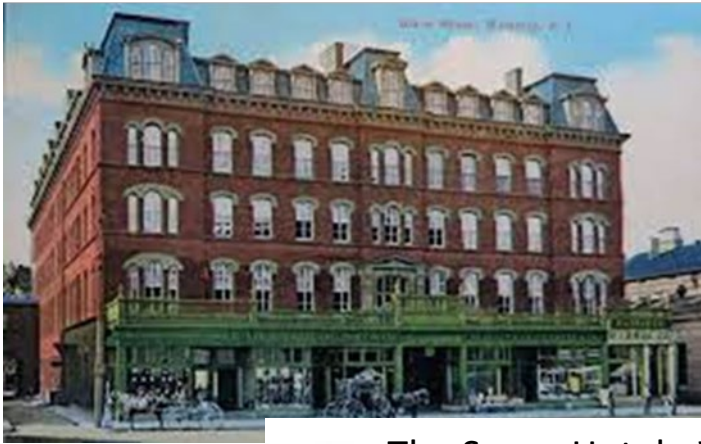
A Business Hotel – targeted at Route 1 Corridor

- Will support non-tourism needs of businesses year round
 - Today, their customers and staff spend their money in Connecticut
- Would anchor restaurants/shops, perhaps in Job Lot’s parking lot desert
- Provide a meeting facility
- Gain significant summer-season revenue by participating in tourism (especially national-branded hotels, easily found on web services)



A boutique “Destination Hotel” allows visitors to plan long weekends and deeply enjoy Westerly

The Dixon House - Westerly



The Savoy Hotel - Westerly



The hotel would draw visitors to stay Downtown

- Arrive by train (or car)
- See/use the United Theatre resources
- Experience the restaurants, the park, the events
- Take advantage of the beaches, river and ocean
- Visit our neighbors in Stonington and Mystic



Westerly could engage with a university architecture school to prepare concept options that investors can consider

- In Nashville they do this via the [Civic Design Center](#)
- For Westerly, Regional/nearby schools that could be contacted include: RISD, Roger Williams, Yale

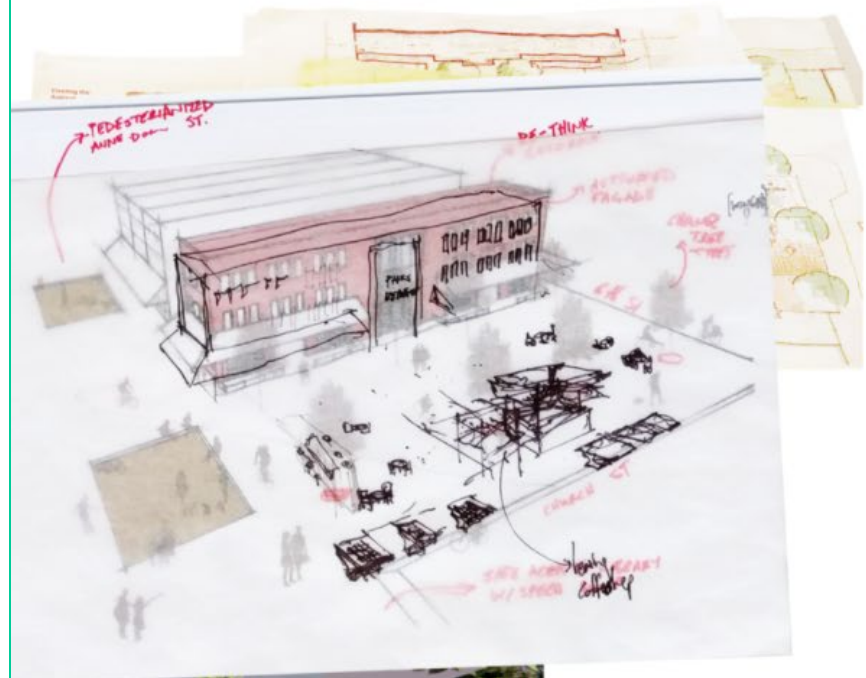
Ideation

We inspire design firms, municipalities or neighborhood groups to take on projects we have dreamed about. Ideation projects can also be spurred by a new development under consideration.

[See all Ideation Phase projects](#)

How Does it Work?

- Property owners are asked to allow students to draft designs/concepts of what could be done with a site/property
- The faculty and property owner provide feedback, commentary, criticism of the school work
- The property owner has no obligation to do anything more, but, may consider any of the proposals as the starting point for a reconsideration of an existing brown-site or aging strip mall.



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There are a variety of stakeholders who will be involved in defining, steering, and oversight of programs

- Active communities of Investors, Business Owners, Conservators, Community Groups
- The elected Town Council must vote-in any required ordinance changes to execute any new vision.
- The Fire Districts with strong “political” influence protect the interests of shore communities.
- Westerly’s sizable community of retirees.
- Young people who tend to feel opportunities are limited; many leave for a better shot.
- The growing population of young professionals working remotely.
- Town planning, zoning and building staff
- Long-serving state representatives and senator; both parties
- Active, well respected representatives in US Congress



Westerly stakeholders should realize material benefits from these initiatives

Westerly Citizens

- Easier, more consistent access to broadband services
- Availability of support for seniors to take advantage of these services
- More robust ability to work from home
- Availability of community-oriented business services like shared office spaces in the commercial/retail areas of renovated malls/greyfields

Businesses/Investors

- More definition of Westerly's direction and intent yields less investment risk
- Less risk yields better decisions with better odds of success
- Coordinated by the plans ordinance changes will provide clarity, reduced business cost and risk
- Goodwill benefits from proactively and constructively helping build a more robust Westerly



Residential Neighborhoods have an interest in but are not directly part of the study scope

- Grove Street-up Park Avenue
- Oak Street to Tower Street
- Granite Hill
- Avondale proper and “Avondale Heights”
- Watch Hill (residential and Bay Street/Downtown Watch Hill)
- Misquamicut
- Dunn’s Corner
- Bradford
- White Rock
- North End – inner North End and North End beyond 78
- East Avenue and Beach Street
- Tum-a-Lum
- Route 1 residential – Dunn’s Corner to Shelter Harbor
- Shelter Harbor and environs



Each of the initiatives has these four elements of a Main Street America's approach:

- **ECONOMIC VITALITY** - capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools
- **DESIGN** - the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.
- **PROMOTION** - positioning; creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.
- **ORGANIZATION** -creating a -sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

